

THE CHRISTMAS GUEST.

A TALE OF LONG AGO.

Night in the Baron's castle,
Night on the windy moor,
The best of nights for the very rich
And the worst for the very poor;
For the Yule-log blazed in the ancient hold,
And the beggar shrank from the biting cold.

The Baron's only daughter,
The little Lady Grace,
Was better dressed than any guest
And fairer in the face;

But never a thought of pride had she,
As they gayly danced round the Christmas-tree

When, lo! an ill-clad stranger
Stood in the fire-light's glow;
His head was bare, his golden hair
All wet with melting snow.

"Whence comest thou?" the children cried,
But only a dim, sweet smile replied.

"It is the little Christ-child,"
Low spoke the Lady Grace.

"I dreamed last night that a halo bright
Shone round that very face.

And he said: 'Be sure you have eyes to see,
For I shall stand by your Christmas tree.'

"So, when they spread the table,
A chair I bade them set

At my right hand for a guest more grand
Than all assembled yet.

And my mother said, when the servant smiled:
'Tis the second-sight. Obey the child.' "

Then all the noisy children
Were silent for a space;

But no one heard him speak a word,
Though the smile grew on his face,

Till they saw a halo, pure and faint,
Round the stranger's head, like a pictured saint.

In strides the stately Baron,
To view the children's cheer.

"Who has the place by the Lady Grace?
How came a beggar here?"

Said the Lady Grace: "God pardon thee!
The little Christ-child dines with me."

The Baron staggers backward
And smites upon his breast.

Before him stands, with clasped hands,
One more unbidden guest.

"Hast thou come back from the dead,
Grace, my sister Grace?" he said.

"They told you falsely, brother,
Seven years ago to-day,

With a father's blame and a blighted name.

I left this castle gray;
But at Christmas-time of every year
I have stood outside, I have seen you here.

"My son comes always with me,
Or else I could not come.

He will ever be like a babe to me,
For he is deaf and dumb,

He slipped from sight when my head was bowed.
And I saw him next in the youthful crowd.

Among the happy children

I left my smiling boy,
For light and heat and enough to eat
Are all he can enjoy;

But I'll take him now, I will go away,
And will come no more on the Christmas Day?"

Nay, then," replied the Baron,

"Thou shalt not go again.

Thy seven years of toil and tears

Amid the scorn of men

Are enough, in sooth, for a lifetime long;

And we've all done wrong—we have all done wrong

Then followed hearty greeting,

Where people wept and smiled;

And the Lady Grace with a warm embrace

Welcomed the silent child.

But she wept that night on her mother's breast

That the Christ-child had not been her guest.

Nay, grieve thee not, my daughter,

The Christ of God has come;

But he chooses to speak through a woman weak

And a child who is deaf and dumb,

And 'as ye have done,' in the Book saith He,

To the least of mine, ye have done to me."